
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE YOUR DRESS OFF AND FIGHT LIKE A MAN?: HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE 1960S CRISIS OF MASCULINITY IN *THE GAY DECEIVERS*

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During the 1960s, it seemed like everything changed. The youth culture shook up the status quo of the United States with its investiture in the counterculture, drugs, and rock and roll. Students turned their universities upside-down with the spirit of protest as they fought for free speech and equality and against the Vietnam War. Many previously ignored groups, such as African Americans and women, stood up for their rights. Radical politics began to challenge the primacy of the staid old national parties. "The Kids" were now in charge, and the traditional social and cultural roles were being challenged. Everything old was old-fashioned, and the future had never seemed more unknown.

Nowhere was this spirit of youthful metamorphosis more obvious than in the transformation of views of sexuality. In the 1960s sexuality was finally removed from its private closet and celebrated in the public sphere. Much of the nation latched onto this new feeling of openness and freedom toward sexual expression. In the era of "free love" that characterized the latter part of the decade, many individuals began to explore their own sexuality as well as what it meant to be a traditional man or woman.

It is from this historical context that the Hollywood B-movie *The Gay Deceivers* (1969) emerged. This small exploitation film, directed by Bruce Kessler and written by Jerome Wish, capitalizes on the new view of sexuality in the 1960s with its novel (at least for the times) comedic exploration of homosexuality. The film centers on the odd couple pairing of straight-

laced law student, Danny, (Kevin Coughlin) and the oversexed gigolo/lifeguard, Elliot, as the pair attempt to dodge the Vietnam draft by posing as a homosexual couple. In order to prove their homosexuality to the skeptical Lt. Col. Dixon (Jack Starrett), the duo move into a flamboyantly-decorated cottage in a gay California neighborhood and try to stave off their yearnings for women while simultaneously attempting to hide their ruse from neighbors, families, and friends. The film may be noteworthy for being a product of the new sexual freedom of the late 1960s, but it also can be viewed as dated, homophobic, and stereotypical. Although there is merit to these claims of homophobia, there is more going on in this film than is immediately obvious. At the core of this film is a representation of the severe crisis in 1960s masculinity.

This essay examines *The Gay Deceivers* as a product of this new 1960s shift in sexuality and gender. After describing the cultural climate of both the United States and Hollywood regarding sex and gender in the 1960s in greater detail, I will give an overview of how *The Gay Deceivers* was both typical and atypical in its representations of homosexuality. This film, however, rarely has been given a thorough treatment beyond a critique of its stereotypes. Although simply pointing out the stereotypical does have its value, there is something much more significant operating within this film. Therefore, after covering this more traditional ground of homosexual stereotypes, I will explore how the film's use of homosexuality is less about simple gay representation and more about a larger crisis in gender identity. *The Gay Deceivers* is actually a battleground for competing versions of American masculinity in which the old, traditional values of family, marriage, and monogamy are challenged by the new freedom of the 1960s. As such, the film also serves as an example how such tactics as feminization can be used to undermine competing masculinities in popular culture texts in order to bolster the hegemony of traditional heterosexual masculinity. Thus, the film's homophobia is less about homosexuality itself than it is about exploring what it means to be (or not to be) masculine both in the 1960s as well as in the present day.

Sexuality in the 1960s: Historical Context in the United States and Hollywood

If this paper is to be predicated upon the immense shifts in sexuality in the 1960s, it is important to first give an overview of the myriad historical changes in attitudes toward sex in both the United States and, more specifically, Hollywood. One of the primary events that helped to shape the new 1960s sexuality actually occurred well before the 1960s: the release of the Kinsey Reports. The Kinsey Reports were a collection of studies in two volumes (released in 1948 and 1953) that examined human sexual behavior. Biologist Alfred Kinsey interviewed approximately 18,000 white men and women about sexual practices (Isserman and Kazin 2000, 152). The reports reveal that Americans had sexual private lives that differed greatly from the conservative public representation. According to the reports, 50% of his sample's women had engaged in premarital sex despite the fact that 80% to 89% of them believed sex before marriage to be immoral. Of his sample, 84% percent of men who finished high school had also engaged in premarital intercourse. Kinsey also found that 37% of men in the U.S. had engaged in at least one homosexual act (Bailey 1994, 236-237). Many individuals also admitted to using prostitutes and masturbating regularly (Isserman and Kazin 2000, 152). According to historian Beth Bailey, the studies' findings unmasked Americans' private behaviors and revealed that many more people were engaging in traditionally "immoral" activities that anyone had known (Bailey 1994, 237). In short, the Kinsey Reports made the private very public while also normalizing the sexual acts that had once been viewed as violating morality.

The sexual revolution among 1960s youth was additionally influenced by the emergence of the birth control pill in 1960, which gave many young women more control over their bodies. Unwanted pregnancy was no longer the threat to young women (or their male sexual partners) that it once was. The research of Masters and Johnson, two scientists at Washington University who studied male and female orgasms for the sake of helping people to maximize their sexual pleasure, was also very significant to the sexual revo-

lution. Such findings as the clitoris being the center of the female orgasm and the possibility of women achieving multiple orgasms normalized sexual pleasure, making it seem healthy and acceptable (Isserman and Kazin 2000, 152-153).

Views of sex among American men were also greatly influenced by the rise of Hugh Hefner and his *Playboy* empire. Hefner's magazine celebrated the naked female form for the pleasure of men. Although the nudity was meant to titillate male readers, according to Hefner, the use of naked women in his magazine was "a symbol of disobedience, a triumph of sexuality, an end of Puritanism" in the face of "our ferocious anti-sexuality" (Bailey 1994, 247). It must be noted that Hefner's new sexual permissiveness was thoroughly heterosexual and male-focused, with women generally functioning as objects for male pleasure. However, the impact of *Playboy* on the sexually permissive 1960s cannot be ignored.

Finally, the sexual revolution was influenced by the rise of the counterculture. Among the counterculture, sex became its own form of protest. According to Beth Bailey, "sex was *actively claimed* by young people and used not only for pleasure but also for power in a new form of cultural politics that shook the nation" (Bailey 1994, 238; italics in original). Men and women began to live together in sexual relationships without being married, and the concept of "free love" between various sexual partners also took hold among those who subscribed to countercultural ideals. All of these diverse influences led to a decade that explored sexual freedom and desire like never before. For homosexuals, this idea of sexuality as protest culminated in the Stonewall Rebellion in June of 1969, which marks the beginning of the modern gay rights movement. After a police raid on the gay hangout, the Stonewall Inn, in Greenwich Village, fed up homosexual men took to the streets to voice their opposition to police harassment and stood up against the authorities for four days. The protests even included a chorus line of singing and kicking drag queens (Isserman and Kazin 2000, 275-276). Homosexuals were no longer shamefully hiding their sexuality as in decades past. Instead, they were now displaying their sexuality on the front lines of protest.

Hollywood was also greatly influenced by this new era of sexual permissiveness. In the past sexuality had largely been concealed in Hollywood movies due to the limitations of the Production Code, which required a film to get a "Seal of Approval" from industry censors in order to be released. The 1960s, however, were different. With the weakening of the studio system due to the rise of television and the divestiture of the studios' exhibition interests in the 1948 Paramount Decision, Hollywood studios had to turn to new novelties to attract patrons, and sex was one of the most obvious selling points. Throughout the 1950s, various films were released that challenged the primacy of the Production Code. Such films as Otto Preminger's *The Moon is Blue* (1953) managed to get wide releases without a Production Code seal. The seal was thus becoming obsolete. As a result, the requirements for a seal began to weaken. Films such as *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), which would have been halted by censors only a decade before due to its depiction of teenage lovers set against mistrusting parents, received seals (Monaco 2001, 56-57).

By November of 1968, the Production Code was dead, and a new system of self-censorship, the ratings system, was put into place. The ratings ranged from suitable for general audiences ("G") to no one under 17 admitted ("X"). The ratings system, compared to the Production Code, was very weak because ratings were not given until after a film was made, whereas scripts needed approval under the Code. If a filmmaker wanted a different rating, he or she could appeal the ruling or simply make cuts to the film until it was satisfactory. Often few cuts were required. The ratings were also voluntary, and responsibility for enforcement lay solely with the exhibitor (Monaco 2001, 64-66). Thus, it became much easier to get a film with sexual content into circulation to a wide audience. The censoring of Hollywood films by the end of the 1960s had undergone a radical reconfiguration that resulted in very little censorship at all. As a result, according to Ethan Mordden, one of the "Ten Commandments" of this newly-liberated Hollywood was that, "Thou shalt deal most honestly with sex in all its varieties" (Mordden 1990, 46).

***The Gay Deceivers*: Progressive Stance or Stereotype?**

The film *The Gay Deceivers* is one film that simply could not have been made a decade earlier in Hollywood, and as such it can be viewed as progressive, in some ways. Previous to this film, which was released only months after the Stonewall Rebellion, homosexual characters and homosexuality had always been relegated to the margins of Hollywood film. In fact, according to gay film scholar Vito Russo, before the 1960s, the word homosexuality could not even be said in a Hollywood movie (Russo 1981, 128). Homosexuality, when present, was usually subtle and disguised, as with Katherine Hepburn's clichéd sissy best friend, Kip, in *Adam's Rib* or the intimate, but clearly platonic, relationship of Richard Arlen and Buddy Rogers in *Wings* (1927). In order to find homosexual representation within films, a person usually had to read very carefully between the lines or note carefully choreographed gestures. It was not until the cusp of the 1960s that chinks in the homosexual-concealing armor finally began to appear in such films as 1959's *Pillow Talk* with Rock Hudson and Doris Day, where Hudson acts gay in order to win Day's trust. Even here, as noted by Gregg Kilday of the gay culture magazine *The Advocate*, the gay joke is played for stereotypical laughs (Kilday 1999).

The Gay Deceivers was a comedy that not only included straight characters posing as gay; it also maintained that depiction *for an entire movie*. In addition, the majority of the film takes place in the midst of a clearly homosexual neighborhood, and the viewer is led inside local gay bars and even a gay costume party, where the filmmakers make in-the-know homosexual camp jokes about icons such as Judy Garland. Quite simply, homosexuality is *everywhere*. Further, by the end of the film, no homosexuals have died or have gone mad in normal "justice of the Production Code" fashion. This film may be the most sustained attempt to display the homosexual lifestyle that was made prior to or during the 1960s. In fact, the film was even advertised as a "slice of gay life" (Russo 1981, 186).

Although its sheer willingness to focus on issues of homosexuality makes *The Gay Deceivers* seem like an advance in homo-

sexual representation in this now Production Code-less 1969, the film still exploits many of the same gay clichés that typified the brief, masked glimpses of homosexuality in Hollywood's past. As noted by Vito Russo, the movie might have been advertised as a progressive-sounding "slice of gay life," but the same ad campaign utilized such generally derogatory words as fag, queer, and deviate (Russo 1981, 186).

In fact, the portrayals of almost every homosexual or homosexual-posing character in the movie are of the stereotypically limp-wristed, pursed-lipped sissy queen variety that has appeared in Hollywood comedies as far back as the primping and fussing cowboy in Stan Laurel's 1923 one-reeler *The Soilers* (Russo 1981). Whenever the film's two heterosexual leads, Danny and Elliot, feign gay for the draft board, their imitations are over-the-top mannerisms and voice modulations. Their version of homosexuality is of the eye-batting, coy look and tight smile variety. For example, Danny, giving his response to a photo of a muscle-bound hunk during his draft psychological evaluation, states bashfully that "Muscles have never been my bag" before biting his lower lip. Throughout the film, Elliot uses similar mannerisms, puckering his lips to say, "You're such a sweetheart," or blowing Danny a kiss in jest when he complains that Elliot is not taking their ruse seriously.

According to the film, these homosexual clichés are not simply the misinterpretations of a couple of lug-headed straights. Almost every gay character acts the same, including the effeminate dog walker adorned in green that the duo see when looking for their new apartment in the gay neighborhood. He bats his eyes and swings his hips flirtatiously at Elliot as he takes his puffy, bow-wearing dog down the street. Their landlord and neighbor, Malcolm (Michael Greer), is the most flamboyant of all. The highly temperamental Malcolm wears ruffled shirts, too-short cutoffs, and an abundance of makeup, and he sashays into every room, flaccid arms swinging every which way. This amateur interior decorator has filled Danny and Elliot's apartment with photos and statues of naked men, and he has decorated only in loud colors. He even brings by a tasseled lamp in the shape of Michelangelo's David,

the essence of camp. During Malcolm's first scene, the viewer is privy to a series of gay jokes at Malcolm's expense. The first shot of Malcolm is actually of his legs prancing into a room, a fruit basket in hand (Get it? Fruit.). As he lights candles in the apartment of the two new tenants, he ignites a lighter which emits an absurdly long flame (Get it? Flamer.). These jokes of effeminate gayness are punctuated on the soundtrack with a dinging bell, a tingling triangle, an upturned note, or a sliding trombone in order to further emphasize the effeminacy of each moment.

The Gay Deceivers also loses its progressive weight through the various suggestions that homosexuals are perverts. According to Vito Russo, in the movies, "Homosexuality, when it is visible, is antisocial" (Russo 1981, 44; italics in original). In his book *Beyond the Closet*, Steven Seidman explores this idea of the "polluted" homosexual in Hollywood films. Seidman notes that in the 1950s and early 1960s, homosexuality was saddled with the baggage of cold war paranoia. Similar to the communist threat, many Americans feared that homosexuality was a corrupting influence on youth that could lead innocent youngsters down a road of perversion and political subversion (Seidman 2002, 26). This construction of the polluted homosexual is in contrast to the idealized "traditional" heterosexuality of marriage and monogamy (13). The lesson of the times was that heterosexuality is the normal, pure sexuality (a position bolstered by churches, schools, and families), while homosexuality breeds deviants, child molesters, and other social undesirables (123). This cinematic vision of the polluted/polluting homosexual, according to Seidman, was one of the principle means of reinforcing heterosexual dominance throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (13). This polluting homosexuality fortifies heterosexual legitimacy, regulating sexuality so that all sexual choice and variation are restricted (155). In short, the traditional, dominant heterosexuality of marriage, family, and monogamy becomes the only legitimate sexuality.

The Gay Deceivers is no exception to this representation of the polluted homosexual. The film is peppered with suggestions that homosexuality is somehow the same as pedophilia. For instance, when in their psychological interview for the draft, Danny

and Elliot are asked whether they prefer young boys or mature men. Danny answers, "I think that when you really love somebody that age shouldn't matter at all." Elliot replies simply, "Do I get a choice?"

Once again one might hope that the equating of homosexuality with pedophilia is just a strained attempt by these characters at posing as gay. However, the possibility of homosexual as deviant child molester appears later when Danny's sister, Leslie, talks to their father, the embodiment of traditional, marriage-focused, and monogamous, heterosexuality. She expresses her fear that Danny's living with Elliot is "unhealthy." In the next scene, the father sees Elliot perform a mocking gay impression in the locker room of the country club where Elliot works as a lifeguard. The impression convinces dad that Elliot is gay. The next shot is of Elliot helping a young boy dive into a pool. The dad interprets this action as an interest in the little boy, and he demands that Elliot be fired, passing word that he has been inappropriately touching children. "That boy's as queer as a three dollar bill," he proclaims to the club owner, and "a bad influence on the kids." Danny's father has done his duty and protected the sanctity of the family from the polluting influence of homosexuality, thus protecting the heterosexual status quo. The film briefly seems to acknowledge the very homosexual bias that it exploits for humor. In one scene, a gay man in a bar talks to Elliot about losing his job and accurately points out that those in the straight world, "treat us like we're diseased or something." This acknowledgement of the treatment of homosexuals as polluted, however, is not enough to convince the viewer that the film is somehow different from this homophobic straight world.

Given these stereotypes of homosexuals as sissy effeminates and deviant pedophiles, it is not surprising that the newly aroused gay liberation movement did not take kindly to the film. In fact, according to Jeremy Kinser of *The Advocate*, San Francisco gays picketed *The Gay Deceivers* at one theatre, an event which *Variety* covered in their article, "Pansies Picket Opening of Gay Film in Frisco." One protester claimed, "this film is not only an insult to the proud and manly gay persons of this community but to the

millions of homosexuals who conceal their identity to fight bravely and die proudly for their country which rejects them” (Kinser 1999). The film was even panned by most mainstream media critics, including A.H. Weiler of the *New York Times*. According to Weiler, this juvenile film is “neither funny nor serious.” Instead, it is a “wit charade with practically everyone a loser” (Weiler 1969). *The Advocate* might be right in characterizing this film today as not a progressive move toward homosexual representation but rather “the most flagrant gay stereotypes this side of Fairyland” (Kinser 1999).

Burrowing Beneath the Stereotypes: The Conflict for Masculinity within *The Gay Deceivers*

Although *The Gay Deceivers* seems to conform to many traditional homosexual stereotypes, how much can we learn from this information alone? It is not enough to simply rattle off a list of positives and negatives of the film’s representations. In order to understand how this film interacts with the larger cultural climate of the 1960s, we must instead delve deeper into what these representations *mean* in terms of the larger cultural climate of the decade. *The Gay Deceivers* may initially seem to be merely a depiction of gay stereotypes, but upon closer examination, the film’s homophobia points to larger cultural shifts in the 1960s. More specifically, the film is about an emerging crisis of masculinity in this new United States of protest and sexual liberation, a contestation of masculinity that continues to this day.

In the 1960s, traditional masculinity was challenged by the increased liberation of women, the vocal protest of homosexuals, and increased sexual promiscuity among the youth culture. It is the tension between these cultural forces and traditional masculinity that this film ultimately addresses. In the film, the stereotypically feminine world of the homosexual becomes the hiding place for Danny and Elliot, two young men who are struggling with their masculine societal roles. In exploring the world of the homosexual, these men are examining the possibility of a new masculinity defined by the 1960s countercultural

values of sexual freedom, equality, and resistance to authority. The film operates, however, to feminize, and therefore, undermine the possibilities of this potentially alternative 1960s masculinity. Thus, in the end, *The Gay Deceivers* reinforces the primacy of the traditional male.

Defining Masculinity(ies)

If *The Gay Deceivers* is, in fact, not so much just an example of homophobia as it is about navigating shifts in traditional masculinity, then a brief discussion of the meanings of masculinity is in order. Traditionally, masculinity or manhood has been seen as being essentially the same as being a biological male. In other words, traditionally gender (masculinity) and sex (maleness) have been treated as the same, existing only in opposition to (and in domination of) the feminine/woman. However, many scholars, such as Judith Butler, have suggested that this link between sex and gender, or men and masculinity, is false, and that gender and masculinity are socially constructed.

If masculinity is socially constructed and does not necessarily belong solely to men, this suggests that there is no one “true” masculinity. Instead, multiple masculinities are possible. R. W. Connell defines masculinities as “configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change” (Connell 1995, 44). According to Michael Kimmel, “. . . we speak of *masculinities*, in recognition of the different definitions of manhood that we construct. By pluralizing the term, we acknowledge that masculinity means different things to different groups of men at different times” (Kimmel 2001a, 22, italics in original).

For Kimmel, “. . . to pluralize the term does not mean that all masculinities are equal” (Kimmel 2001a, 22). Rather, there are competing masculinities in which one hegemonic image of masculinity defines itself through its differences with a variety of competing “others,” such as the masculinity displayed by racial and

sexual minorities and by some women. Thus, "One definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated." Quoting sociologist Erving Goffman's 1963 assessment of the ideal masculine figure, Kimmel suggests that the hegemonic view of manhood is "a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports" (Kimmel 2001b, 271). All other versions of masculinity compete with and are compared (always negatively) to this hegemonic ideal. Thus, just as the hegemonic masculinity has always had the patriarchal upper hand on femininity, so too does it dominate other, competing masculinities.

In order to assert its dominance over other competing masculinities, the hegemonic (and homophobic) masculinity not only defines itself against other "inferior" masculinities. According to R. W. Connell, "in homophobic ideology the boundary between straight and gay is blurred with the boundary between masculine and feminine, gay men being imagined as feminized men and lesbians as masculinized women" (Connell 1995, 40). Thus, when dealing with masculine identity associated with homosexuality, in order to strengthen its position the hegemonic masculinity tends to define itself in opposition to homosexuality *and* conflate male homosexuality with femininity. As a result, the possible competing masculinities of a homosexual male have been stripped of their place as examples of masculinity; they instead are relegated to the "inferior" realm of the feminine. The binary is in this way transformed so that it is not so much a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality as it is a split between masculine and feminine. By performing this feminizing maneuver, the hegemony of traditional, heterosexual masculinity is maintained as the competing homosexual masculinities are effectively banished from the masculine realm. This allows heterosexual masculinity to seem to be the only true "pure" masculinity, while homosexual masculinities are tainted by the feminine. As a result of this feminization, homosexual masculinities are relegated to the bottom of the masculinity hierarchy (Connell 1995, 78).

Competing Masculinities in The Gay Deceivers

The conception of hegemonic masculinity as a young, white, heterosexual urbanite is central to understanding *The Gay Deceivers*. Danny, the protagonist, represents this dominant masculinity. Danny is young, engaged to be married, and is heading to Stanford Law School. At the beginning of the film, he has already been guaranteed a job in a profitable firm upon graduation. He has wealthy, urbanite parents. He usually wears suits and ties. He is, essentially, the protégé of traditional masculinity. His fiancé, Karen, perfectly fulfills the expected submissive gender role of the woman. At dinner with Danny, Karen exclaims, "I wish we finally had a place to ourselves and I could cook and play house with you." She is perfectly content to play the traditional role of wife and mother to a careerist husband. Danny, in true homophobic fashion, is also very uncomfortable with any form of intimacy with other men. He is constantly unnerved by Elliot putting on his "fag routine," and he even insists on changing into his pajamas in the closet so that Elliot doesn't see his body. Danny, in short, is the typical white, wealthy, heterosexual male.

Elliot, however is somewhat different from Danny: he is strong, prone to violent outbursts (he punches out numerous homosexuals for little reason throughout the film), and he lives off of his good looks. Elliot is the embodiment of a breed of masculinity that developed at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, one that celebrates the *Playboy* philosophy of life. This *Playboy* masculinity views women as interchangeable, sex as a contest, and fun as consumerism (Bailey 1994, 248). This philosophy is expressed by Elliot himself in the statement, "Booze or broads. There's always room for one more, I always say." This lifestyle is not the same as the traditional masculinity of wealth, family, and job security. However, it is similar to traditional masculinity in its pronounced heterosexuality, its devaluation of women, and its emphasis on strength and action. Thus, between the pair we see two versions of the dominant 1960s masculinity: money, family, and career paired with violence, action, and sexual conquest. Both of these sides of the dominant masculinity are potentially threat-

ened by the rise of the women's movement, the popularization of anti-establishment thought in the counterculture, and the raising of gay voices in opposition to the white, male, heterosexual ideal of masculinity.

The masculinities portrayed by Danny and Elliot hit a crisis point when they must face the draft board. Historically, the military has been associated with hegemonic images of masculinity and its corresponding patriarchy (Kimmel 2001a, 23). Danny and Elliot, who are in some ways traditional masculine figures, however, do not wish to go to Vietnam. They are faced with a choice: maintain the traditional masculine (and dominant) role by participating in military combat or reject their construction of masculinity and join the forces of social change in defining a new, anti-war, anti-violence, anti-establishment, and anti-homophobic masculinity.

It is the tension between these two masculinities, the hegemonic masculinity and the competing 1960s anti-establishment masculinity, that Danny and Elliot must navigate. They initially choose to pursue the anti-establishment masculinity by passing themselves off as homosexual to the draft board (in itself a rebellious, anti-establishment act). However, the film refuses to actually support such a new, non-traditional version of masculinity. Instead, the film uses its derogatory representations of homosexuality and overall sense of homophobia in order to ridicule and eventually weaken the non-traditional masculine position, thus eventually reinforcing the importance of maintaining hegemonic gender roles.

The film's primary method of bolstering the place of hegemonic masculinity is through feminization, or taking away from the homosexual "countercultural" figures all characteristics that might make them seem traditionally masculine. By placing these two masculinity-in-crisis characters, Danny and Elliot, in opposition to a world that is feminized, the result is an exaggeration of traditional masculinity and a resulting devaluation of the competing masculinity (Kimmel 2001b, 280). In short, the hegemonic masculinity is privileged over the competing masculinity because the competing masculinity has become feminized, and therefore, inferior. This contention is supported by sociologist Michael Kim-

mel's statement that, "Media images often reinforce traditional stereotypes of masculinity and discredit and undermine images that might promote change" (Kimmel 2001a, 31). In Vito Russo's estimation, this is not unusual in Hollywood films, as "Homosexuality in the movies, whether overtly sexual or not, has always been seen in terms of what is or is not masculine" (Russo 1981, 4).

This feminization of the competing countercultural/homosexual masculinity is achieved through the association of homosexuals with overtly feminine dress, set decorations, props, and mannerisms. According to R. W. Connell, hegemonic culture:

... has a simple interpretation of gay men: they lack masculinity. This idea is expressed in an extraordinary variety of ways, ranging from stale humour of the limp-wrist, panty-waist variety, to sophisticated psychiatric investigations of the 'aetiology' of homosexuality in childhood. . . . If someone is attracted to the masculine, then that person must be feminine. . . . (Connell 1995, 143)

Time after time in this film, homosexuals are treated as if they were actually women in men's bodies, and therefore not "real men." Thus, the film's abundance of effeminate gay men clichés are always contrasted to the heterosexual Danny and Elliot, and, through these contrasts, the duo's traditional masculinity is reinforced.

For instance, throughout the film, homosexuality and transvestitism are treated as if they are synonymous. This is especially true of Malcolm's costume party. At the party, most of the party-goers are in drag, as if every homosexual man actually wants to be a woman. Still posing as a homosexual, Elliot lisps and limps his way through the scene to conceal his heterosexual masculinity. In this party sequence, however, the presence of feminized drag queens exaggerates Elliot's clear heterosexual masculinity, particularly when Elliot mistakes one man in drag for a real woman. When he takes her to the back room to make out, the drag queen's wig comes off, and Elliot is left in a state of shock and dismay. The realization of the drag queen's true sex creates a shock that separates Elliot from his faked homosexuality. In the face of a man dressed as a woman, he can no longer pose as gay, and his

heterosexual secret is finally discovered by draft officer Lt. Col. Dixon, who walks in on Elliot and the man in drag.

This opposition of hegemonic masculinity and male femininity is underscored in a scene where Elliot, attempting to reassert his dominant, heterosexual masculinity, picks a fight with the drag queen. Taunting the drag queen, Elliot exclaims simply, "Why don't you take your dress off and fight like a man!" This simple statement by Elliot suggests that this homosexual counterculture representative has allowed traditional (and, according to the film, the only true) masculinity to be tainted by the trappings of femininity. In a dress, the drag queen is still a man, but feminized and very different from/inferior to the heterosexual Elliot. The drag queen is a man who is not performing his gender correctly, and therefore, according to Elliot, he should take off the dress and stop defiling the hegemonic vision of heterosexual masculinity. Thus, the use of a feminized figure such as a drag queen works to highlight Elliot's hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity while simultaneously undercutting the competing "feminized" homosexual/countercultural masculinity's validity.

Traditional masculinity is also supported by the construction of the character of the hyper-effeminate Malcolm. Malcolm is consistently constructed as a man who has no traditional masculine characteristics; he is only feminine. He decorates cottages in bright, feminine colors such as hot pink, and he buys expensive perfumes. His womanly taste is confirmed by Danny's visiting mother, who is charmed by Malcolm and finds that he has an exquisite eye for decorating. She is especially impressed that Malcolm knows the names of her clothing designer. In contrast, the very traditionally masculine father seems highly skeptical of Malcolm and his flamboyant tastes. Thus, Malcolm is clearly associated with the feminine in opposition to the masculine norm of the father.

Malcolm is also a consummate cook. Dressed with an apron that displays a design of a woman's body, Malcolm, the self-proclaimed "fairy god mother," minces around the kitchen cooking an omelet for the culinarily-impaired (and thus stereotypically masculine) Danny and Elliot. While cooking, Malcolm puts a rose in his mouth and gives a Flamenco snap of his fingers, playing out

the part of a woman dancer. The entire time, the hyper-heterosexual Elliot watches from the wings, laughing at the absurdity of this feminized “flamer.” When Elliot tries the omelet, Malcolm is horrified that he would eat it with his hands. Malcolm is near tears that his food would be consumed in the manner of a ruffian (Malcolm gives a similarly overly-emotional response when a woman steps on his prized flowers). This comic portrayal of dinner manners underscores the traditional masculinity of these beer-drinking, cooking-incompetent heterosexuals who don’t know how to appreciate the good cooking of a feminine “lady” like Malcolm.

Although there are many examples of this attempt at defining traditional masculinity against femininity in the film’s use of characters, costumes, mannerisms, and set dressings, nowhere is this attempt more pronounced than in the promotional campaign materials for *The Gay Deceivers*. At the top of the movie’s poster is displayed a waist-up picture of Elliot pursing his lips effeminately and holding a pillow. Below the pillow hang the symbols for Man and Woman. The tag line reads: “Is he? Or isn’t he?” The use of the symbol for Woman to suggest homosexuality is the clearest marker of homosexuality as feminized. The underlying hegemonic masculinity, however, seeps through the poster’s tease with the completing statement, “Only his draftboard [sic] and his girlfriend know for sure.” The mention of the girlfriend, complete with a shot of Elliot in bed with a woman, clearly undermines the possibility of the feminized Elliot. In the poster it is clear that the effeminate Elliot is only a joke and the heterosexual norm is revealed to be the reality. Thus the possible subversiveness of this poster and its suggestion of non-traditional values is revealed to be a sham that only reinforces the dominant ideal.

The film’s socially conservative agenda is laid bare at film’s end as this foray into the untraditional has worn thin for both Danny and Elliot. The hypersexual Elliot is hungry to be with women again, and the aspiring family man, Danny, wants only to win back his fiancé, Karen, who has left him because of his supposed homosexuality. Danny proclaims to Karen his return to traditional masculine values of family and career. “I know exactly what I want to do with my life,” he explains. “I want to be a lawyer, I want to marry you, and I

want to have children.” Danny has realized that it was not worth turning his back on traditional values in order to avoid the draft, and his suffering continues when Karen leaves Danny for good.

The conservative cautionary tale continues when Danny talks to his father. Danny’s father lectures him about having gone countercultural by dodging the draft and faking homosexual leanings. He sternly asks, “Do you realize that this will be on your record for the rest of your life? . . . Did you even ask any of your fairy friends what it’s like to have a stigma like that attached to you?” Danny has learned that his transgressions have only caused trouble. He would now rather go to Vietnam and risk death like a good, traditionally masculine man, than support the countercultural beliefs in antiwar protest and sexual liberty. Thus, this stereotypical and homophobic film has managed to use its images of feminized, inferior homosexuals in order to reinforce traditional American, masculine values of career, family, respectability, and love of country. In the end, the competing masculinities of tradition and of countercultural, personal, and sexual freedom have faced off, and the hegemonic tradition has emerged victorious.

Conclusions

The Gay Deceivers is a film that is very much tied to the decade in which it was made. This movie, which could not have been produced in Hollywood previous to the sexual and cultural revolution of the 1960s, was in some ways a first. However, its stereotypical representations make the film now feel simplistic, sophomoric, and just plain dated. The stereotypes in the film, however, are not only reflective of homophobic sentiment in the 1960s. The stereotypes also interacted with the traditional, hegemonic vision of White, male, heterosexual masculinity in a way that reinforced America’s dominant vision of manhood in the face of competing, countercultural masculinities. Thus, the film seemingly resolved the tensions between competing masculinities, once again allowing the traditional masculinity of family, money, machismo, and heterosexuality to win out. This vision of traditional masculinity is still with us even today.

But is the resolution of this conflict between differing masculinities of the 1960s really so cleanly resolved in the film? In the final scene, Danny returns to the draft board to confess his countercultural transgressions. However, the draft board still does not want him. After Danny leaves, Lt. Col. Dixon, who has pursued Danny and Elliot for the entire movie, notes to his assistant, "Well, that's my job, Joe. Weed out all the undesirables. We don't want their kind in the army, now do we, Joe?" At this moment, Dixon puts his arm around Joe and gently strokes his earlobe in a subtle homosexual gesture.

What does this scene, which seemingly contradicts the traditional morality of this homophobic film, mean? Apart from being a final comic "bit" with which to end the film, this scene seems to suggest that despite all efforts to return to the normalcy of previous conceptions of masculinity, the crisis of masculinity continues. After all, if the military, that bastion of traditional masculinity, has been overrun by the influences of the new 1960s America, is anything safe? The film, with its stereotypes and derogatory slurs against gays, may be taking sides with the hegemonic construction of masculinity. However, it also seems to be saying that it knows that the uncontested dominance of traditional masculinity is a thing of the past. Like an old curmudgeon stuck in its ways, the film states that it will never be like the "good old days" again. In this way, *The Gay Deceivers* may have been very appropriate for its time: stuck in its old ways, yet haunted with the knowledge that the days of the unchallenged dominance of "traditional" masculinity were numbered. Like Elliot facing off with the drag queen, the movie asks society to take its dress off and fight like a man, but, just as in the movie, the dress stays on, and the knockout punch might still belong to the guy in drag.

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